



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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**Environment Committee Public Hearing
March 7, 2022**

**Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt
Testimony in Support of:
SB 243: An Act Concerning Climate Smart Agricultural Practices**

Senator Cohen, Representative Gresko, Senator Miner, Representative Harding, and honorable members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on SB 243: An Act Concerning Climate-Smart Agricultural Practices. My name is Bryan Hurlburt, the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture.

As Commissioner of the Department, I had the privilege of chairing the Agriculture/Soils Sub Working Group of the Governor's Council on Climate change, which collectively identified 51 near-term goals to support Connecticut in meeting its climate change targets. Agriculture continues to play a vital role in climate change mitigation and adaptation and we thank the committee for recognizing how climate smart agricultural practices are vital to supporting that role and our partners for working on this piece of legislation.

The COVID 19 pandemic highlighted how essential our Connecticut farmers were in securing our food system while also dealing with unprecedented climate events. The summer of 2021 saw historic rainfall, often flooding entire crop yields and the effects of those weather events tricked into our fall pumpkin patches and our winter Christmas tree season; further highlighting how the effects of climate change continue to ripple through our industry long after the rain has passed.

The Department currently can reimburse farmers for part of the cost of compliance with their comprehensive farm nutrient management plan or farm resources management plan, provided this plan has been approved by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. This bill would expand to also allow the department to pay for these costs up front. **As statute does not allow the department any recourse should a farm fail to complete their plan, or comply with their approved plan, we are hesitant to offer a 100% payment up front. We suggest allowing a partial up-front payment.**

Section (b) would remove the reimbursement cap, currently set at fifty percent of the cost or 20 thousand dollars, whichever is less. (State owned land or municipally owned land with an agricultural lease of 5 years or longer is at ninety percent or 20 thousand dollars, whichever is less). **The Department objects to the removal of this cap without substituting for a possible higher cap.** Farm equipment can run in the hundreds of thousands, and without a cap on the amount requested, it would greatly diminish the number of projects the program would be able to support.



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This section would also require the Department to prioritize this funding allocation to “socially disadvantaged producers and new farmers.” This past year, the department launched a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in CT Agriculture Working Group, which includes an Access to Resources, Infrastructure, and Business Planning topic group. Through this working group, and last year’s legislative change including urban and nontraditional farming practices as indicated purposes in our agency grants, we believe this requirement of the program is unnecessary at this time.

This legislation acknowledges the difficulty that farmers may face in transitioning to climate smart agricultural practices. The upfront expenses for specialized machinery may be costly and implementing new practices could result in an initial decline in crop yield. The Department is committed to continuing to work with our partner organizations to identify ways we can mitigate losses to farmers as they support Connecticut in reaching its climate change goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide supportive comments on this piece of legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions and our legislative liaison, Kayleigh Royston is available to you at Kayleigh.Royston@ct.gov.